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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

RELATIONSHIP NATURE AND INTENSITY:  
THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH JEALOUSY  
IN DATING RELATIONSHIPS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

BY  
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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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## ABSTRACT

The nature and intensity in dating relationships were examined in association with jealousy levels. Respondents included 50 (38 women and 12 men) graduate level students at a mid-size, midwestern university. Information was gathered utilizing the Relationship Closeness Inventory (Berscheid, 1989), Interpersonal Jealousy Scale (Mathes & Severa, 1981), and a questionnaire assessing the nature of a current romantic relationship and demographic information. Experimental analysis demonstrated a significant relationship between intensity and jealousy at the .05 alpha level. No significant findings were found to exist on a continuum between jealousy and the nature of the relationship at the .05 alpha level. These results imply that as dating relationships increase in intensity, the extent to which one's partner has an impact on his or her life should result in increased levels of jealousy.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Jealousy in romantic relationships continues to be described in terms of dating or marriage, without regard for the uniqueness of each stage of the dating relationship. Mathes and Severa (1981) suggest that a contemporary trend has been established in dating relationships. This trend, serial monogamy, involves maintaining a series of close, heterosexual relationships. Serial monogamy holds that people will eventually lose or share their partners. This instability in permanent partnering increases the potential for jealousy. Romantic jealousy is defined as, "a complex of thoughts, feelings, and actions which follow threats to self-esteem and/or threats to the existence or quality of the relationship when those threats are generated by the perception of a real or potential romantic attraction between one's partner and a (perhaps imaginary) rival" (White, 1981a). Its prevalence in society provides rationale for investigating its complexity and the varying degrees in which it plagues romantic dating relationships.

Despite the often disturbing nature of romantic jealousy, it has only been of significant interest in the scientific field for about 15 years. Contemporary research has primarily focused on five major areas. The first area examines the mutual influence of jealousy and self-esteem. Several studies have detected a significant inverse relationship between these two constructs in relation to romantic relationships. Decreased levels of self-esteem have been correlated with increased levels of romantic jealousy (Buunk, 1982; Buunk & Bringle, 1987; Leary, 1990; Mathes, Adams, & Davies, 1985; McIntosh, 1989; Salovey & Rodin, 1991; Stewart & Beatty, 1985; White, 1981b). Findings by Schmitt (1988) state that as self-esteem levels go down and jealousy intensifies, the threatened



partner reacts by derogating his or her rival in an attempt to boost his or her own lowered self-esteem.

Another set of studies relates romantic jealousy with the degree of dependency in relationships. Studies have shown that high degrees of dependency in a relationship are positively related to high degrees of jealousy (Buunk, 1982; Buunk & Bringle, 1987; Mathes & Severa, 1981; White, 1980, 1981b; White & Mullen, 1989). Insecurity is also a factor which has been examined in relation to the jealousy issue. As a person's security in a romantic relationship decreases, the jealousy level increases. In effect, an inverse relationship between jealousy and security has been noted in several studies and pieces of literature (Buunk & Bringle, 1987; Mathes & Severa, 1981; McIntosh, 1989; McIntosh & Tate, 1990; Radecki-Bush, Bush, & Jennings, 1988; White & Mullen, 1989).

The perception of a person's locus of control has also received considerable attention in the jealousy literature. An internal locus of control has been indicated to correspond with low levels of jealousy. Similarly, an external locus of control has been indicated to correlate with high jealousy levels (Duck, 1992; McIntosh & Tangri, 1989; Radecki-Bush, Farrell, & Bush, 1993; White, 1980). The most pertinent factor in current research addresses relative involvement. Those who perceive themselves to be more involved in the relationship tend to be more threatened by a perceived rival (Bringle & Boebinger, 1990; Bringle, Renner, Terry, & Davis, 1983; Hansen, 1985; Mathes, 1986; Melamed, 1991; White, 1981b).

The present study follows the theoretical approach of White (1981a) in viewing jealousy as involving thoughts, feelings, and actions. Sharpsteen (1993) emphasized the emotive nature of jealousy. Pines (1992) held that as jealousy involved cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components, integrative therapeutical approaches are needed to examine each facet. The various elements of jealousy reveal a complexity that the current study recognizes. The threatened partner perceives a threat to his or her romantic

relationship, whether real or imaginary, and experiences negative emotions. Actions that follow, such as emphasizing attraction to a potential partner or derogating one's rival, allow the threatened partner to deal with their emotions. Outcomes that affect the relationship result from the chosen coping strategy of the individual. Testing of this concept in relation to various features of romantic relationships demonstrated that jealousy is positively correlated with feelings of inadequacy, sexual exclusivity, and putting relatively more effort in to the relationship than one's partner.

White and Mullen (1989) stated that because jealousy is complex, it affects people differently depending on the relationship in which they are involved. The ingredients contributing to each person's jealousy change with his or her experiences, values, and circumstances (Barker, 1987). Since it is possible to feel differently about distinct relationships which have varying levels of importance, it is possible to be afflicted with different sorts of jealousy (Duck, 1986). The basis for the present study seeks to examine the extent to which the nature of the relationship (e.g., exclusively or casually dating) and the level of intensity have an affect on the level of jealousy in dating. This study hypothesizes that as the relationship nature progresses from casual dating to exclusive dating, the intensity will also increase. The level of jealousy will escalate with intensity.

The literature on dating relationships fails to address whether relationship nature and intensity have an affect on the level of jealousy in these relationships. Studies have related jealousy to self-esteem, dependency, insecurity, locus of control, and involvement in the relationship. These factors provide rationale that if a person is committed to a romantic relationship, as opposed to casually dating, any notion that his or her partner may leave for a rival promotes greater turmoil. It follows that more damage should result in terms of self-esteem when a close partner provides rejection than a partner for whom one casually dates. Based on past findings that self-esteem is negatively correlated with

jealousy, as one's self-esteem becomes more dependent on developing the relationship, jealousy becomes more likely.

In terms of dependency, as a relationship progresses from casual dating to exclusive dating, partners become more dependent on each other. Past research supports a positive relationship between dependency and jealousy. As a romantic relationship becomes more intense, the probability of jealousy should rise. Insecurity research contributes that if a partner with whom one is seriously involved provides rejection, more insecurity should develop than with a partner one casually dates. Increased insecurity is correlated with increased jealousy, therefore the more prone someone is to insecurity in a relationship, the more likely he or she will experience increased jealousy.

When a dating couple proceeds from casual dating to exclusive dating, their locus of control should shift from internal to external. This is based on the contention that the partners are influenced by decisions with two people in mind, not just one. It follows then that as another person has more control in one's life, the locus of control should shift. When a relationship is threatened by a perceived rival, external influences increase. Studies have shown a positive relationship between external locus of control and jealousy. Consequently, as the locus of control shifts with relationship intensification, jealousy potential should increase.

Relationship loss is central to the experience of jealousy (White, 1981a). The more involved a person becomes in a relationship, the greater the loss of rewards will be if a rival intervenes. Social Exchange Theory (Sabatelli & Sheehan, 1993) supports this view. Accordingly, the relationship found to exist in past research between involvement and jealousy provides support that progressing nature of a relationship and intensity should correspond with increased jealousy. Though past research and literature have contributed to this concept, few have investigated the direct effect of intensity and the nature of the relationship at each phase in reference to jealousy. Jealousy is a continuum

and should not be differentiated in to dating or marriage. Dating relationships change and experience many different phases. Bringle and Boebinger (1990) suggest that one of the errors of past jealousy research has been that all relationship types have been lumped together. The present study attempts to address this concern.

It is examined in the present investigation the extent to which the nature of the relationship and intensity levels affect the levels of jealousy in dating relationships. It is hypothesized that as the nature of relationships progress from casual dating to exclusive dating and the intensity increases, jealousy levels will increase.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Self-esteem

The literature supports the inverse relationship between self-esteem and jealousy in romantic dating relationships; as jealousy increases, self-esteem decreases. Salovey and Rodin (1991) hypothesized first that high levels of jealousy are related to the importance of one's domain. Domain was described as areas of functioning in one's life (e.g., fame and popularity). Secondly, they proposed that jealousy and envy were strongly associated with the degree to which one's domain does not meet the expectations in mind (e.g., intrusion of a rival). Finally, high jealousy and envy would be correlated with low global self-esteem. The first study surveyed readers of a popular psychological magazine. Of the 25,000 respondents, 6,482 (1,595 men and 4,887 women) were randomly selected. The survey administered consisted of the following measures: importance of relationship exclusivity, importance of life domains (e.g., attaining personal wealth), six items from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory, idealizations regarding life domains (e.g., how respondent would like to be in terms of success in his or her field), behaviors which may exhibit jealousy, and situations which are related to jealousy. Results showed that those life domains which ranked the highest in importance were correlated with higher levels of jealousy. Also, it was found that those domains which do not measure up to the respondents' idealizations produced more jealousy. Those with low self-esteem were also noted to have greater levels of jealousy than those with high self-esteem. These results imply that the greater something is in importance, the more of a threat exists when it is challenged. In addition, when an important domain does not meet expectations, as when a

rival threatens a valued relationship, greater jealousy results.

This procedure was replicated with a smaller sample from the town of New Haven, Connecticut (Salovey & Rodin, 1991). Participants consisted of 75 men and 145 women who answered the exact questionnaire from the previous study. The results were duplicated, therefore supporting the previous findings. Low self-esteem was demonstrated to be associated with high jealousy.

Leary (1990) attempted to explain self-esteem in terms of Social Exclusion Theory. The basic suppositions of this theory are that human beings possess a fundamental motive to avoid exclusion from important social groups, much of one's behavior reflects one's attempts to improve one's inclusionary status, and the perception that one's inclusion in a group is less than is desired results in negative affective states. In relation to romantic relationships, people avoid exclusion from desired relationships. Much of their behavior reflects an attempt to improve their relationship. Being less included in a relationship than one desires results in upset. Jealousy is a factor when there exists a threat to one's inclusionary status in a valued relationship. Being accepted and included in a social group or relationship bolsters self-esteem. Consequently, exclusion from the same desired group or relationship decreases self-esteem. Summarily, exclusion from a social group or valued relationship results in increased jealousy and decreased self-esteem.

While Leary (1990) holds that exclusion from a valued social group is central, Buunk and Bringle (1987) contended that jealousy results largely from social comparison; the jealous partner views the rival in relation to his or her own qualities. Jealous partners try to find inferior qualities in their rival to salvage their own self-esteem. When rivals are seen as superior, self-esteem plummets. Another explanation of the relationship between self-esteem and jealousy is that if the rival is unattractive, the jealous partner's

self-esteem may decrease due to feeling that his or her partner may not be discriminating. Jealousy is still present because the rival, unattractive or not, is a threat to the relationship.

The provided literature supports the findings that low levels of self-esteem are related to stronger experiences of jealousy when a romantic relationship is threatened by a rival. When a person is involved in an exclusive relationship, it follows that the nature of the relationship is more committed and the intensity level is higher than in a casual relationship. Being rejected by a person for whom one deeply cares is much more aversive than the same treatment by a less valued partner. When a highly valued partner leaves a relationship for a rival, self-esteem is lower than if a casual partner does likewise. There is considerably more threat involved when considering the loss of a close mate. Accordingly, as the relationship becomes more intense and reaches exclusivity, jealousy potential should increase.

### Dependency

In terms of relationships, dependency is described as a situation in which partners in a relationship receive high rewards for their involvement and depend on their partner exclusively for those rewards. The rewards are based comparatively to those which may be sought in other relationships (White & Mullen, 1989). As relationships progress from casual to exclusive, partners are perceived to provide more rewards than any other relationship could. Any type of threat that those rewards may be intercepted by a rival should be highly jealousy provoking. Therefore, as the dependency escalates due to change in the nature of the relationship, rewards become more valuable and jealousy should be higher as a result of any interference from an outsider.

White (1990) conducted a study to demonstrate this relationship. It was proposed that a person who is dependent on his or her partner should be able to gain better outcomes from his or her partner. This occurs when the jealous partner leads his or her partner to believe he or she may seek a more rewarding relationship somewhere else. The

participants for this study were 150 romantically involved heterosexual couples who responded to advertisements in newspapers at the University of California. Each was reimbursed \$1.50 for their participation. The questionnaires were distributed after the couples were separated to insure honest answers. The packet contained questions which consisted of open-ended questions. The first question was, "Have you ever tried to get your partner jealous over your relationship with someone else on purpose?". Next, the participants were asked to outline their reasons for provoking the jealousy and to discuss what actions they took. Results demonstrated that there were five major categories of responses. The first was the desire to increase relationship rewards (e.g., wanted more attention). Participants also wanted to bolster their self-esteem (e.g., felt inadequate). Testing the relationship was also a frequent answer (e.g., test partner's love). Revenge and punishment were also reported as motives. Their reasoning for these included, respectively, that their partner was making them jealous and that the couple was fighting. The most popular method for inducing jealousy was exaggerating a current attraction to another. These findings represent the notion that those who are dependent on relationships utilize jealousy as an effective method to keep the relationship rewards of their partner. These partners view third party interference as highly threatening and resort to jealousy when feeling vulnerable. The more dependent a partner becomes, the more jealousy is viewed as an option to gain more relationship rewards.

In relation to literature, White and Mullen (1989) and Buunk and Bringle (1987) offer some interesting insights in to the relationship between jealousy and dependency. First, White and Mullen state that dependent partners receive the greatest amount of rewards from their relationship. The rewards are unique and not readily available elsewhere. Consequently, threats to receiving those rewards result in high distress, namely jealousy. Buunk and Bringle contribute that emotional dependency in a relationship promotes higher jealousy when one's partner shows interest in another person. This is



explained in terms of two components. The first is realizing the number of available alternatives outside of the relationship. For example, a person who feels he or she will not be able to find a partner as rewarding as his or her current partner becomes more dependent. This usually occurs as the relationship becomes more committed due to natural progression. The second factor involves the extent to which a person's emotions are affected by his or her partner's actions. Positive memories and investments are shared as a relationship progresses and increases the couple's emotional bonds. With the support of these two factors, jealousy is more likely as partners become more dependent upon one another. Each person has more to lose and is more sensitive to his or her partner's actions.

As presented through both investigation and the literature, jealousy is shown to be higher in relationships where partners are more dependent. The fact that dependency in dating relationships is generally associated with exclusivity as opposed to casual relations, evidence should be provided to support that as the nature of the relationship progresses, jealousy should become more salient. Also, dependent relationships experience relatively more intensity than independent relationships. This supplies evidence to support the notion that as intensity levels increase, so will the levels of jealousy in the romantic relationship.

### Insecurity

The level of insecurity in relationships has also received considerable attention in the jealousy literature. Insecurity is usually attributed to feelings of not being at ease with the current status of a relationship. In association with jealousy, insecurity is the inability to feel confident regarding the relationship when a rival interferes with a valued partner. Consequently, the more intense a relationship becomes and progresses to exclusivity, the more jealous a person should become if the security of the relationship is challenged.

A study by McIntosh (1989) strongly supports the association between jealousy and insecurity. He hypothesized in this investigation that those who reported high

insecurity would also report higher levels of jealousy. Participants were recruited from introductory psychology classes at a predominantly African-American university. Extra credit was awarded to the 61 males and 67 females who participated. Measures included the Interpersonal Relationship Scale, Self-Description Scale, Insecurity Scale, and Internal-External Locus of Control Scale. Results correlated high jealousy levels with high levels of insecurity. Lower levels of security in his or her role as a partner correspond with high levels of jealousy when a rival threatens his or her relationship. The more a person is committed to the relationship and dates his or her partner exclusively, the more disturbing the thought of losing his or her partner to a rival.

White and Mullen (1989) offer valuable insight in to the dynamics between insecurity and jealousy. They describe arrangements of security as the investments made to minimize vulnerability and prevent loss of rewards. This arrangement is made with the partner and depends in part on the interaction which takes place between them. Security in a person's relationship is compromised when reacting to a real or perceived threat. Therefore, the more investments a person has made in a relationship, the more threatening a rival appears to be to the jealous partner's security. As the insecurity increases, the jealousy level also rises.

Buunk and Bringle (1987) also offer that in dating relationships, before marriage, when there is more likelihood for the partner to leave, insecurity levels are high. When a person becomes involved in a relationship and displays vulnerability through taking risks, there is insecurity due to the absence of a permanent commitment. There tends to not only be unsuredness regarding one's partner's feelings, but also with one's own feelings. A lack of uncertainty exists surrounding the future and contributes to insecurity. As a couple becomes more involved, notions of the future become more salient, yet not concrete. This produces insecurity regarding the course of the relationship and the investments to be

made with the partner in mind. This transition period contributes to the vulnerability of the partners. Jealousy should therefore increase when a rival either exists or is perceived.

The presented investigation and theories advocate for the existence of a positive relationship between insecurity and jealousy. As a person becomes more vulnerable in a relationship with regard to his or her status and rewards received, any threat to that relationship is viewed as extremely disturbing. As a couple makes the transition from casual to exclusive dating, there are more factors with which to be concerned. The partners become more vulnerable to each other in terms of what direction they will take in the future. Jealousy should increase as this insecurity becomes more prevalent in the growth of the relationship.

#### Locus of control

A person's locus of control has been established as a key focus in the jealousy literature. An internal locus of control is the extent to which a person has control over his or her own fate. An external locus of control is the extent to which others manipulate one's own destiny. There have been several studies supporting the contention that the extent to which a person perceives his or her fate to be in the hands of others, the more threat they experience when a rival intrudes. When a person becomes involved in an exclusive, committed relationship, the locus of control shifts from internal to external due to the fact that his or her partner has more influence on his or her life choices. When a rival is involved, it is perceived that this third person also affects his or her life and alters outcomes for him or her. As a result, the more a person's life is disrupted by an outsider, the more his or her locus of control shifts and higher jealousy results.

Radecki-Bush et al.(1993) also formulated a hypotheses which addressed the issue of locus of control and jealousy. Depressed and insecurely attached individuals were expected to perceive threats to their relationships as more distressing and use more ineffective coping mechanisms. The investigation recruited individuals from an

introductory psychology subject pool. The respondents consisted of 135 people (89 females and 46 males) who were involved in on-going, exclusive dating relationships. The measures distributed to assess the respondents were comprised of the Close Relationships Questionnaire, Beck Depression Inventory, Relationship Perceptions Scale, Differential Emotions Scale, and the Ways of Coping. All packets were counterbalanced to eliminate test order effects. Results presented that depression and insecure attachment were related to a higher perception of threat by a rival. It was noted that those who experience more threat altered their ratings of security, control, self-esteem, and jealousy. For the purposes of the present study, it is important to examine the relationship between more threat to the relationship by a rival and the perceived control a person has in the relationship. Increased levels of threat were found to be associated with decreased levels of control in the relationship. As a person becomes more affected by his or her partner through increased commitment, his or her locus of control shifts and produces increased jealousy levels.

In terms of literature, Duck (1986) also addressed the issue of an association between locus of control and jealousy. Duck states that jealousy is usually accompanied by a person's fear that he or she has lost control over his or her partner's feelings for him or her. The loss of control constantly changes depending on different intervening variables. As a relationship progresses, the partner's lives become more intertwined and produce greater influence over each other. This itself decreases a person's feelings of control. When a third party threatens the union and diminishes the control even further, increased jealousy results.

The presented investigation and literature provide grounding for the association of external locus of control with high levels of jealousy. As a relationship becomes exclusive and partners consider each other before making decisions, locus of control shifts. Actual threats or perceived threats by a rival elicit upset and further diminish the control a person has in his or her relationship. When a relationship is exclusive and partners rely on each

other for rewards, it is an intrusion when a third party interferes. This supports the present hypothesis.

### Involvement

The most salient variable in support of the connection between jealousy, relationship intensity, and status is relative involvement. A number of studies have been completed to assess the level of involvement in relationships in association with perceived threats by a rival. Studies have correlated increased involvement in relationships with increased levels of jealousy. As partners become more involved and their relationship intensifies, their experience with jealousy should also escalate.

Bringle et al. (1983) researched aspects of jealousy-provoking situations. The three variables studied included the stimulus event, partner's personality characteristics, and the relationship itself. Participants were recruited from introductory psychology classes, an engineering class, and a history class, all at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis. The respondents consisted of 71 females and all received credit for their participation. A questionnaire was administered to all participants which was divided in to three sections. The first section prompted the participants to recall past and current relationships by asking descriptive questions about the partner. The next task involved answering questions pertaining to the dynamics of the relationship (e.g., relative involvement in the relationship). The final section asked each person to imagine themselves in several jealousy-evoking situations and to rate how upset he or she would be in each situation. Results found that those who reported being more in love and more involved tended to be more upset when reading the jealousy-evoking scenarios. These results imply that those with relatively more involvement in a relationship, as opposed to those with minimal involvement, experience greater jealousy in ambiguously threatening situations. Those people will more likely perceive third persons in the relationship as more threatening and experience greater levels of jealousy.

### Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory provides a solid theoretical foundation for the present investigation. As described by Thibaut and Kelley (1959), social exchange principles state that, "...every individual voluntarily enters and stays in any relationship only as long as it is adequately satisfactory in terms of his rewards and costs." More specifically, "...the exchange framework addresses the ways in which attraction, satisfaction, reciprocity, fairness, commitment, trust, and dependence function as mediators of the deepening levels of involvement that characterize the courtship relationship" (Sabatelli & Sheehan, 1993). It follows that more rewards in relation to costs must be exchanged between partners if the relationship is to progress and intensify. Rewards are described as pleasures, satisfactions, and gratifications the person enjoys which serve as positive reinforcements for behavior. Costs have been labeled by Blau (1964) as, "investments, direct costs, and opportunity costs which are defined respectively; time and effort devoted to skills that will benefit others, resources given to others in exchange, and abandoned rewards from other relationships to become involved in a particular relationship". The more rewards received from a partner, the more disturbing it should be if a third party threatens to intercept those rewards.

It has been presented by Ekeh (1974) that two traditions exist in Social Exchange Theory. The first states that collectivistic exchange occurs when individuals behave to meet the needs of the social system. Patterns emerge and exchanges occur to uphold collective social norms. Conversely, individualistic exchange theories contend that societal norms develop as individuals consistently seek to meet their own needs. The latter approach is consistent with the dynamic of the present study. As individuals move to establish exclusive dating commitments and become more intensely involved, decisions are made regarding the rewards their partner may have to offer. As third party threats

become salient, the jealous partner is disturbed by the possible loss of rewards to him or her, not the loss of rewards to society.

Primary to Social Exchange Theory is the concept of comparison levels (CL). Comparison levels were first introduced by Thibaut and Kelley (1959) and described as standards by which people make decisions regarding costs and rewards in their relationships and compare them to what is expected. It is noted that as relationships progress over time and maintain their status as satisfying, expectations of the partners for one another tend to increase. When partners in a relationship make increased investments, more is expected from each partner to continue providing increased rewards. It is deemed by the partners in exclusive dating relationships that each partner provides rewards which are superior to rewards which may be obtained from alternative partners outside of the relationship. Regarding jealousy, if one partner feels threatened by a third party, it is thought that the non-jealous partner may be considering alternative partners. The jealous partner ponders the futility of his or her investments and the possibility of losing his or her rewards to a rival. Relating to the current investigation, the more rewards expected and investments made, the more jealousy should result when these factors are threatened.

More specific to the principle of the comparison level as presented by Thibaut and Kelley (1959) is the comparison level of alternatives (CL<sub>alt</sub>). "When the outcomes available in an alternative relationship exceed those available in a relationship, the likelihood increases that a person will leave a relationship" (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). It is important to note that this comparison is subjective and relies on the impressions of the involved partners. Thinking that a better alternative does not exist provides a foundation for partners to become exclusively committed to one another in terms of rewards and investments. This factor is interesting in that jealousy is often an imagined threat and is based on the perception of the jealous partner. It is the jealous partner's perception that an alternative may exist for his or her partner and disturbing emotions develop.

Social Exchange Theory provides relevant implications for the previously cited variables; self-esteem, dependence, insecurity, locus of control, and relative involvement. Evidence was provided to establish an inverse association between low self-esteem and high jealousy. Couples who are intensely involved and date only their partner should be more prone to high levels of jealousy if a rival to the relationship is perceived. The more invested in the relationship a partner becomes and expects rewards which enhance his or her self-esteem, the more distressing it should be if those rewards were threatened to be intercepted by a rival.

Similarly, a strong correlation was demonstrated to exist between high dependence and jealousy in romantic relationships. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) specifically address this issue with their definition of dependence, "Dependence is defined as the degree to which a person believes that they are subject to or reliant on the other for relationship outcomes." The more exclusive a couple becomes and seeks to rely solely on their partner to provide relationship rewards, the more disturbing it should be if an outside person attempts to interfere with one's partner and the rewards he or she provides.

High insecurity was shown to be strongly correlated with high levels of jealousy. Relating to Social Exchange Theory, partners maintain security in their relationship by expecting certain rewards and investing in their partner. The more intense a couple becomes and seeks rewards from only their partner in terms of romantic involvement, the more adverse it should be if a rival challenges these transactions. Also, locus of control is an important factor to relate to Social Exchange Theory. Exclusive involvement with a partner inevitably results in a shift of control from internal to external. This shift to external continues if a rival challenges one's relationship rewards and investments and serves as a factor to further extract control from the jealous partner. The more intense a couple's relationship becomes and partners choose to date only one another, the more the jealous partner will feel distressed if his or her rewards are intercepted.



The final factor to be related is relative involvement. A positive correlation exists between high levels of involvement and high levels of jealousy. According to Social Exchange Theory, the more involved a person becomes in a relationship, the more investments the person is willing to make. Likewise, people expect more rewards from their partners as exclusive dating commitments are established and the relationship becomes more intense. Any threat outside the relationship that may interfere with the investments made and rewards received should promote high duress.

### Summary

Through presenting investigations and literature in the field regarding jealousy and some of its well-known correlates, there is support for the hypothesis in this study that increased relationship intensity and progression of the nature of the relationship contribute to increased levels of jealousy. Self-esteem and jealousy were demonstrated to share an inverse relationship. As self-esteem decreases, jealousy levels increase. This is relevant to the current study in that as the relationship becomes more intense, it would be more disturbing to one's self-esteem to lose a partner that one truly cares for as opposed to a partner one casually dates. The jealous partner would experience great upset if he or she thought his or her relationship rewards may be given to a rival.

Dependency on the relationship was also presented to be directly related to jealousy. As one becomes more dependent on the relationship, jealousy levels also increase. When a couple's relationship becomes increasingly intense, they depend more on each other to provide rewards. Any threat that a third party may take away those rewards should result in high distress, namely jealousy. In terms of insecurity, jealousy was indicated to be directly related. As a person's insecurity level in the relationship increases due to third party intervention, so does the level of jealousy. When a relationship intensifies, the partners are made more vulnerable as they rely on each other for direction, rewards, and decisions regarding the future. The intervention of a rival should be more

upsetting at that time when there is an abundant amount of uncertainty pertaining to the direction of the relationship. Thoughts that another could take one's partner and receive his or her relationship rewards should instigate increased levels of jealousy.

The investigation and literature presented provide information that as the locus of control shifts from internal to external, there is a greater likelihood that jealousy will result. An increase in the intensity of a romantic relationship attributes to this shift as another individual has more of an effect on one's life decisions and rewards received. Threat of a rival promotes more of a shift as an additional person appears to have control over one's romantic partner and the receipt of future rewards. As this occurs, jealousy levels should increase.

Finally, the level of involvement was shown to be positively related to jealousy. As a person's romantic relationship becomes more involved, the dynamics should intensify. Any perception of threat to the establishment of exclusivity, a salient reward in committed relationships, should result in high levels of jealousy. These five correlates demonstrate distinct relationships in association with jealousy and therefore offer strong support for the present hypothesis: as the nature progresses and intensity increases in dating relationships, the level of jealousy will increase. Dating relationships experience many unique changes which must be examined as such, not grouped together as one dynamic. Results for the present study will specifically address this concern.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

#### Participants

Participants for this investigation were recruited from graduate courses at a midsize, midwestern university. Solicitation of the subjects was possible after permission was granted by course instructors prior to class meetings. The subject pool was appropriate as the majority of the respondents were involved in dating relationships, not married or involved in a life partnership. Respondents who indicated marriage or the absence of a current romantic involvement of at least three dates were invited to complete the measures. Packets with this indication were not included in the analysis.

#### Measures

The survey utilized to question respondents consisted of measures to gather demographic information, obtain information on the nature and length of a current, romantic relationship, rate jealousy levels, and assess relationship intensity. The demographic inventory gathered information from the following areas: gender and age of self and partner, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. Respondents were asked to either fill in or mark the appropriate space to indicate their answers.

The nature and relationship length were assessed within the demographic survey. Respondents were asked to indicate in months and years the time spent with their partner and the current nature of the specified relationship. The nature of the relationship was presented as follows: casually dating (dating others besides partner), exclusively dating (dating only partner), cohabiting (living with partner), engaged (not living with partner), engaged (living with partner), and married. The Interpersonal Jealousy Scale (Mathes &

Severa, 1981) was utilized to rate jealousy levels in the respondents' current dating relationships. This scale was chosen due to its consistency of correlating with romantic love (Mathes, 1986; Mathes, Roter, & Joerger, 1982). In addition, the Interpersonal Jealousy Scale has been noted as an accurate assessment of jealousy in both heterosexual and gay men couples (Hawkins, 1987). Because gay and lesbian couples were not excluded from the potential pool of respondents, selecting a measure sensitive to varying sexual orientations was a primary focus. The wording on the measure was altered to address this concern. The scale's author was consulted and supported this decision. It was his conclusion that the alterations would not provide threats to the reliability or validity (personal communication, January 2, 1996).

The Interpersonal Jealousy Scale is a 28-item scale which assesses individual levels of jealousy. Scores are attained by asking respondents to use a scale ranging from "9= absolutely true, agree completely" to "1= absolutely false, disagree completely". Each item contains an "X" in which the name of the current partner is to be inserted (e.g., If X were helpful to someone of the opposite sex/same sex, I would feel jealous). A high score on this scale indicates high jealousy. The validity (.92 alpha reliability) of this scale as a measure of jealousy in association with threat to a relationship has been established (Mathes & Severa, 1981; Stewart & Beatty, 1985).

The scale selected to assess relationship intensity was the Relationship Closeness Inventory (RCI; Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989). This measure tests the degree to which partners in a relationship are interdependent on each other in terms of frequency, diversity, and strength. The authors of this measure refer to the combination of these elements as the degree of closeness which exists between two people. The implications are for either an absence or presence of this construct. For the present investigation, these three elements are examined in terms of a continuum, and therefore will be referred to as

intensity. The three scales are transformed into a single scale of relationship intensity and are derived from the conceptualization of closeness by Kelley et al. (1983).

The RCI was selected for the current investigation based on the associations which may be established between frequency, diversity, strength, and Social Exchange Theory. As presented, Social Exchange Theory provided strong implications for the exchange of costs and rewards with respect to self-esteem, dependency, insecurity, locus of control, and relative involvement. To understand this relationship, frequency, diversity, and strength must first be defined according to Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto (1989).

Frequency was explained as the impact in terms of the amount of time that individuals spend alone with their relationship partners during their waking day. This provides support for the supposition in Social Exchange Theory that the more time partners spend alone together, choosing time with their partners over time with alternative relationships, the greater the exchange of rewards and costs should be. Diversity is defined as the number of different domains in which relationship partners engage in activities together. It follows then from Social Exchange Theory that the more facets of life that partners are involved, selecting their partner's company over alternative companions, the more investment transactions that should take place. Finally, strength is described as the extent that relationship partners influence each other's everyday behaviors, decisions, plans, and goals. The greater the extent to which partners make an impact on the activities of one another according to Social Exchange Theory, the more expectations each partner will have regarding future transactions. This is noted as the most salient factor as it contributes to intensity. For the purpose of the present investigation, the increase in time spent together, number of activities, and impact on the partners provides rationale for the selection of this measure as it relates to Social Exchange Theory.

The first question on the RCI requests that the respondent indicate their partner's first initial in a given space. Next, a measure was included to assess the amount of time spent alone with the partner at specific times of the day (e.g., During the past week, what is the average amount of time, per day, that you spend alone with X in the morning ). Respondents were directed to answer in terms of hours and minutes. The participants' next task was to indicate with an X the number of activities completed alone with their chosen partner (e.g., did laundry, talked on the phone, etc.). Respondents were then asked to rate the extent to which they strongly agree (1) or strongly disagree (7) with the amount of influence their partner has on various aspects of their life (e.g., financial security, moods, etc.). The final section assesses the effect the participant's partner has on his or her future plans and goals (e.g., vacation plans, school-related plans, etc.). Respondents were instructed to indicate the level of impact from not at all (1) to a great extent (7). High scores on the compilation of these sections denoted the degree of closeness experienced in their relationship.

### Procedures

After permission was granted by individual course instructors, consent forms were distributed to all willing participants. When signed, consent forms were gathered and survey packets were given to each volunteer. It was explained that the purpose of the survey was to assess attitudes in dating relationships. It was advised that names should be excluded from the packets to insure complete anonymity. Respondents were informed that the measure contained three separate sections, and upon completion, should be placed in an envelope at the front of the room. A letter containing debriefing information and a faculty contact was given to each participant after handing in the measures.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Descriptive Statistics of Sample

The respondents included in this sample consisted of 38 women and 12 men ranging in age from 22 to 44 years old ( $M = 25.12$ ,  $SD = 3.81$ ). The identified romantic partners for this sample ranged in age from 18 to 48 years old ( $M = 26.66$ ,  $SD = 5.69$ ). The majority of the respondents reported European American (33) as their racial/ethnic background. Other responses included Asian American (8), African American (3), Mexican American (1), Native American (1), and other (4). Of those questioned, 47 indicated heterosexual as their sexual orientation and 3 indicated involvement in a lesbian partnership. The average length of romantic involvement reported by the participants ranged from 1 to 96 months ( $M = 21.78$ ,  $SD = 23.76$ ). Responses regarding the nature of the indicated relationship included those who were casually dating (16), exclusively dating (25), cohabiting (3), engaged (4), and engaged while living with partner (2). Tables 1 and 2 include a summary of these results.

Table 1

#### Mean Relationship Length and Age of Partners (N = 50)

Variable	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	Min.	Max.
Length	21.78	23.76	1.00	96.00
Self Age	25.12	3.81	22.00	44.00
<u>Partner Age</u>	<u>26.76</u>	<u>5.58</u>	<u>21.00</u>	<u>48.00</u>

Note. length = months; age = years

Table 2

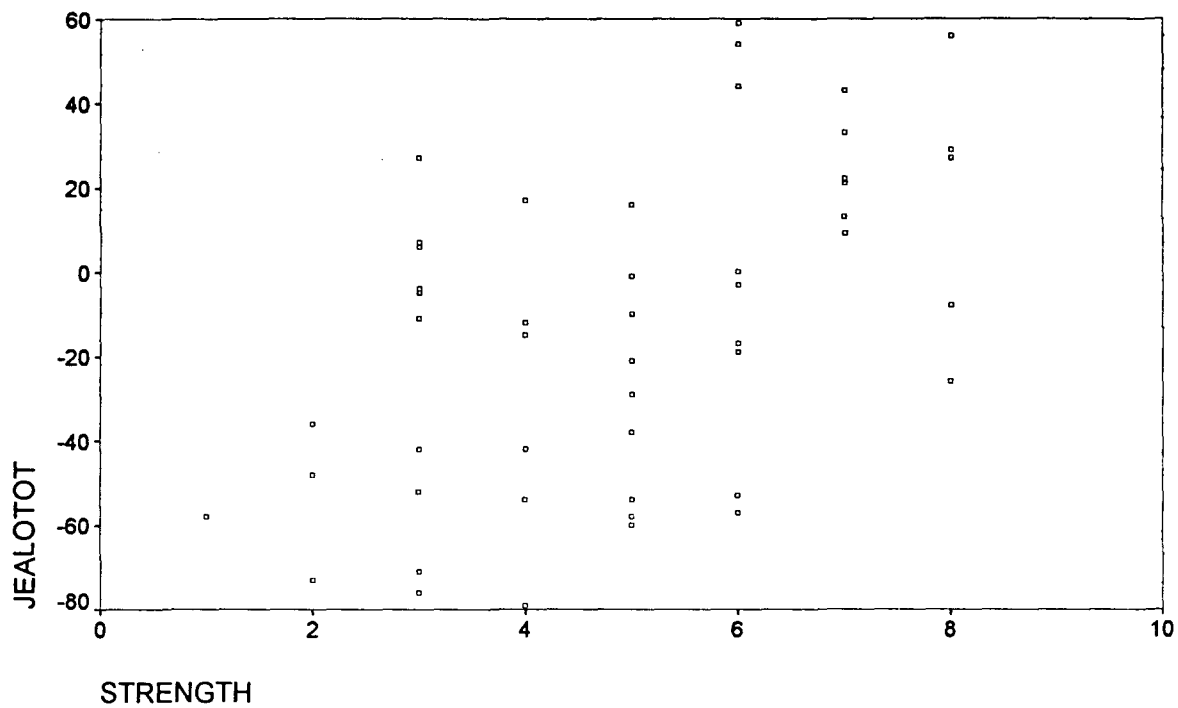
Sample Demographics (N = 50)

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Variable</u>	<u>Number</u>
Self gender		Orientation	
Male	12	Heterosexual	47
Female	38	Gay	0
Partner gender		Lesbian	3
Male	35	Bisexual	10
Female	15	Nature of Rel.	
Race/Ethnicity		Casual	16
European Am.	33	Exclusive	25
African Am.	3	Cohabiting	3
Asian Am.	8	Engaged	4
Mexican Am.	1	Engaged/Cohabiting	2
Native Am.	1		
Other	4		

In order to test the association between the nature of a relationship and level of intensity with jealousy levels in dating relationships, multiple regression was performed. The nature of the relationship and level of intensity were assigned as the predictors, and the level of jealousy was utilized as the criterion. The purpose for the chosen statistical analysis was to examine whether or not the nature of the relationship and intensity levels serve as predictors for jealousy levels in dating relationships, and if this relationship is significant at an alpha level of .05.

Means for the noted variables were found to be -11.8 (SD = 38.92) for jealousy, 5.86 (SD = 1.93) for frequency, 2.02 (SD = 1.04) for nature, 4.96 (SD = 1.85) for strength, and 5.64 (SD = 1.41) for diversity. An R Square of .346 demonstrated that diversity, frequency, strength, and nature accounted for only 34.6% of the variability. It is shown that strength (B = .62) contributed the most to the variability and was statistically significant at  $p = .0001$  (see Figure 1). Other factors did not contribute to the variability and were not statistically significant. Table 3 provides results for the regression analysis.





**Figure 1.** Jealousy as a function of relationship strength.  
Partner's impact on activities: 0 = little impact; 10 = great impact

The prediction equation was demonstrated to be highly significant at  $p = .0006$ , therefore the variability in the jealousy scores was accounted for by the nature of the relationship and intensity levels. The regression equation was shown to be highly inaccurate. The level of jealousy in the examined dating relationships was not highly predictable in relation to the nature of the relationship and intensity levels and fell an average of 32.84 from the expected values. These results provide partial support for the present hypothesis. Higher jealousy levels were not demonstrated to share an association with the progression of dating relationships from casual to exclusive dating, yet were significant for exclusive relationships (see Figure 2). Evidence was shown that a relationship does exist between strength and jealousy.

Table 3

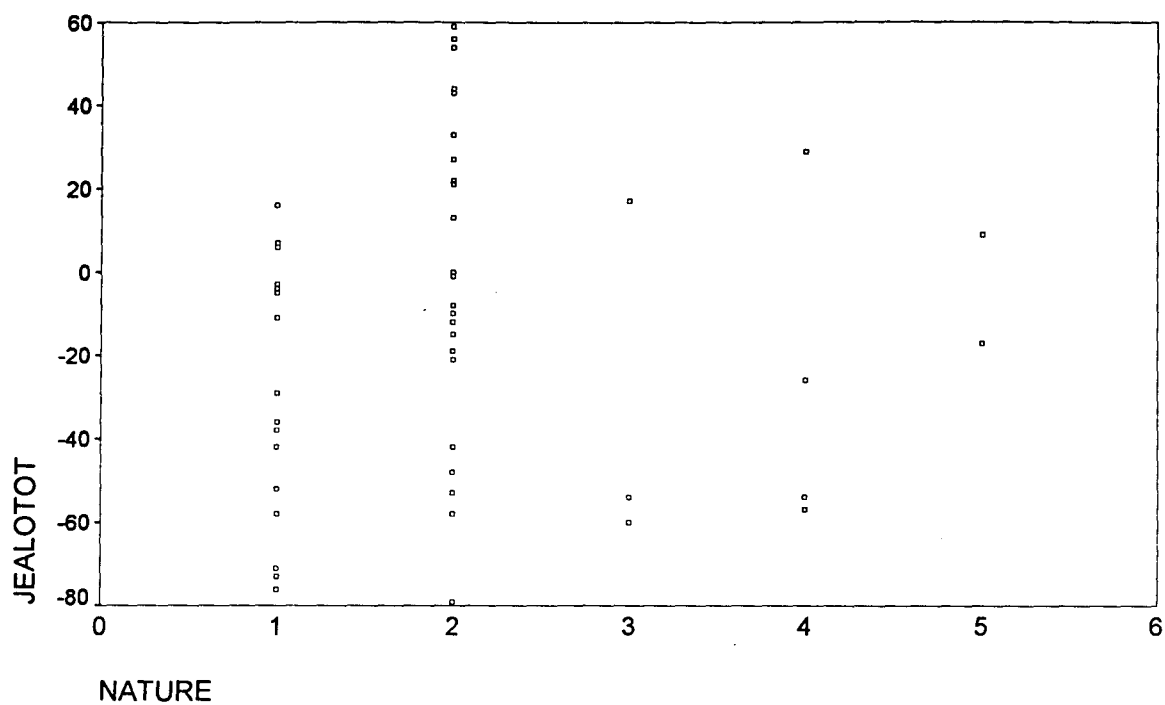
Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Jealousy (N = 50)

<u>Variable</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>SE B</u>	<u>Beta</u>
Frequency	0.18	3.11	.01
Nature	-9.87	5.49	-.26
Strength	13.08	3.00	.62*
Diversity	3.26	4.09	.12

Note. R Square = .34

\* $p < .05$ .

Post hoc testing utilizing multiple regression provided a few interesting findings. Strength of the relationship was shown to be significant in relation to jealousy for exclusive relationships ( $p = .04$ ), yet not in casual relationships ( $p = .48$ ). Analysis of gender differences resulted in a significance of  $p = .006$  for females and  $p = .15$  for males when the strength of the relationship was examined in reference to jealousy levels.



**Figure 2.** Jealousy as a function of relationship nature.

Nature is defined as: 1 = casual; 2 = exclusive; 3 = cohabiting  
4 = engaged; 5 = engaged/cohabiting

Significant results were reported for the length of the relationship when the reported time together was longer than three months. In this case, strength of the relationship was significant ( $p = .003$ ) in relation to jealousy.

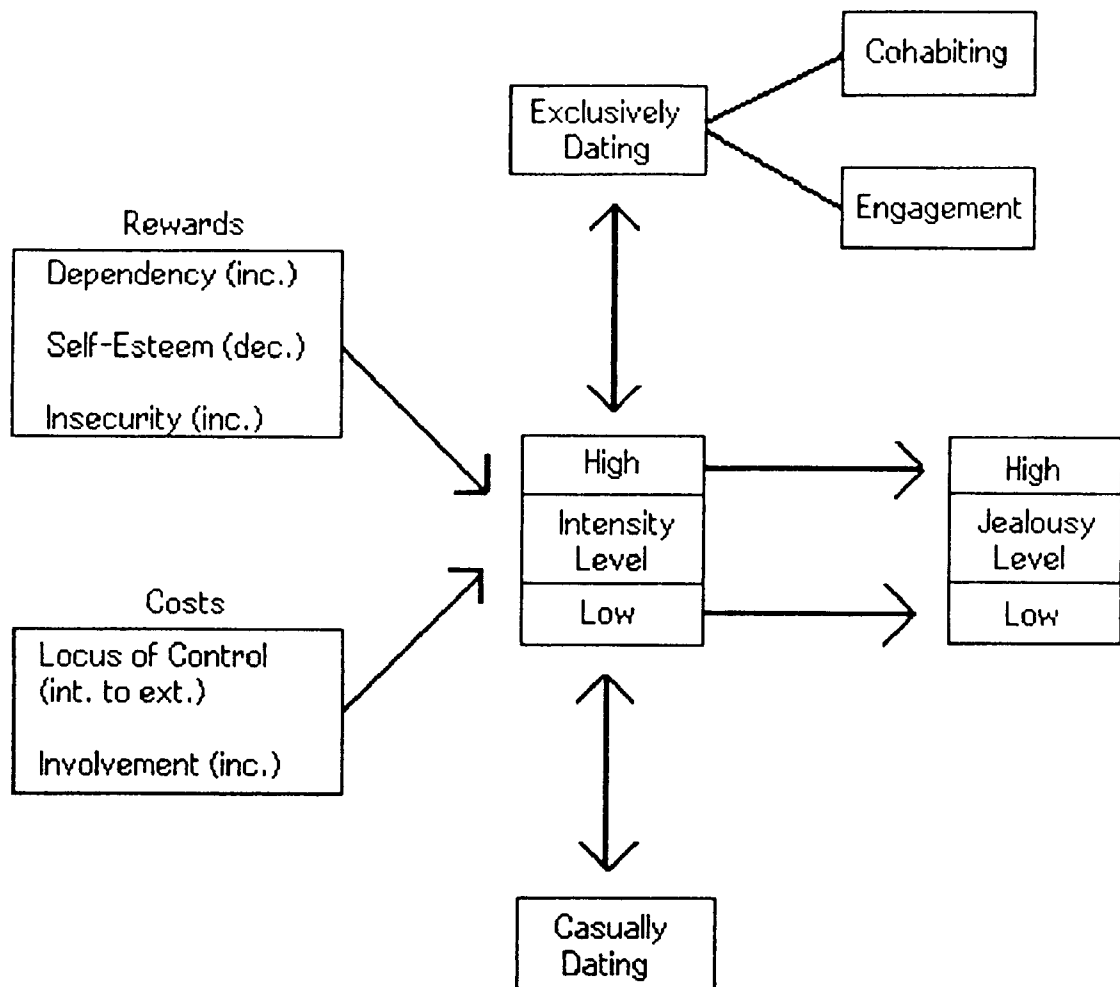
## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The present study sought to investigate the association between the nature of relationships and intensity levels with levels of jealousy in dating relationships. It was predicted that as the nature of relationships progress from casual dating to exclusive dating, the level of jealousy will also increase. The results only partially support this prediction.

It was demonstrated that increased jealousy levels were significantly related to increased strength in dating relationships, an indicator of the extent to which each partner has an impact on the events in their partner's life. This factor is the most salient subscale in the RCI as it is related to intensity in relationships, therefore these findings are significant. Because diversity and frequency did not show any statistical significance it is noted that these two factors may not be relevant to relationship intensity. The number of different activities and amount of time a couple spends together may not affect the life decisions each partner makes, especially during the first 3 months of involvement. After the 3 month period, an individual may identify his or her self as an extension of his or her partner. The impact of his or her partner on life decisions therefore increases. The fact that a small sample indicated this relationship provides rationale for examining this association in a larger sample. Figure 3 represents this relationship.

The nature of the relationship when classified as casual did not demonstrate a significant relationship with jealousy levels, yet when examined alone, exclusive relationships were related to increased levels of jealousy. This finding implies that up until a certain point in a relationship, usually the 3 month mark, jealousy is not a prevalent



**Figure 3.** Intensity as a moderator between Social Exchange variables and jealousy in dating relationships.

relationship dynamic. After this 3 month period, couples seem to become more committed to their partners and claim exclusive status. This signifies strong implications for the methods in which the nature of the relationship was examined. For measurement and analysis purposes, nature of the relationship was established as a continuum. Examination of the results implies that a clear distinction may be made between casual and exclusive dating. This suggests that viewing nature of the relationship as dichotomous is a more accurate assessment of this variable.

More specific analysis of women indicated that the strength of the relationship was related to increased levels of jealousy. This finding may be due to the large number of females compared to the small number of males included in the sample. The inaccuracy of the regression equation may have also been a result of the small sample size. A larger number of respondents may have contributed to a higher accuracy of predicted jealousy scores in relation to the nature and intensity of the romantic involvement.

Those who had been involved in the reported relationship for more than three months demonstrated that increased levels of relationship strength were related to increased jealousy levels. This may be due to the fact that after this time period, couples enter in to exclusive relationships and rely more on each other for relationship rewards. It is also noted that the longer a couple is involved, the more time there is to make investments in the relationship.

Diversity of activities and the frequency with which the partners spent time together did not provide any significant results. The number of various activities the respondent reported completing with his or her partner did not impact the level of jealousy in the relationship. Likewise, the amount of time that the respondent indicated that he or she spent with his or her partner did not alter the level of jealousy experienced. Friends may spend a great deal of time together engaging in many different activities, yet may not influence one another's goals and life decisions. Those involved in exclusive, romantic

relationships experience the strength dynamic without having to spend much time together. This is representative of those respondents who claimed to be significantly impacted by their partners, yet were involved in long distance relationships.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Past research has supported many claims that jealousy is a complex experience, and therefore related to many constructs. Several studies have linked levels of self-esteem, dependency, insecurity, locus of control, and involvement with jealousy levels. In previous research, a positive correlation was found to exist between dependency and jealousy. As a couple becomes more dependent upon one another for relationship rewards, the more jealousy they will experience if a rival intervenes.

Insecurity was also demonstrated in past literature to share a positive relationship with jealousy levels. As a couple becomes more secure in their relationship with their partner and feels comfortable with the current status of their partnership, threats to that security will result in increased jealousy. Being comfortable in a valued relationship is a reward according to Social Exchange Theory, and any threat that a rival may pose is highly disturbing.

A negative relationship was demonstrated to exist between self-esteem and jealousy in previous investigations. As a person begins to rely upon his or her partner for relationship rewards that bolster self-esteem, the possibility that a third party may take those rewards is greatly distressing. A person who is involved with a valued partner will feel more distress if rejected than if it is a lowly valued partner.

As locus of control becomes more external, the level of jealousy was also shown to increase. Evidence for this relationship is supported in past literature. Allowing another person to have influence over one's life is a notable investment in the relationship. When a third person poses threat to that investment, control becomes more external and higher

jealousy results.

Finally, involvement is associated with high jealousy in past literature. As a person becomes more involved with his or her partner, greater investments are made in the relationship. Threat by a third party that those investments may prove futile are upsetting. These factors contribute to the present study based on the Social Exchange Theory. The more investments of the self made in one's partner and the more rewards sought from him or her, the greater the upset if this exchange is disrupted.

These five variables from previous research are consistent with the Social Exchange Theory and are widely applicable to the present investigation. Those who identify themselves as exclusive daters rely solely on their partner for rewards associated with romantic involvement. In addition, Social Exchange Theory provides a basis for the fact that the longer a person is involved in a relationship, the more jealousy he or she experiences. As the length of a couple's relationship increases, past 3 months, the more investments one is willing to make in their partner. Any threat that a third party may prove those investments worthless will result in high levels of jealousy.

These findings are important because they bring awareness to the fact that many of the past studies in the area of jealousy were developed out of the notion that all relationships belong to one category. The fact that there are many stages of dating relationships with varying intensity levels provides rationale for this investigation. It cannot be expected that a couple who has just met will share the same dynamics as a couple who has been exclusively dating for three years. The results of a study based on casual daters cannot be generalized to a group of exclusive daters. This information is relative to the counseling experience. Counselors may assess client issues more accurately knowing that each stage of the dating relationship is indicative of certain features.

Counselors may also benefit by acknowledging that certain stages of relationships are prone to higher jealousy and using this information to examine the effect of jealousy as

a motivator for jealous behaviors. A couple that has dated for three years may react to threat more strongly than a couple that has only been together for a few weeks. More serious implications for diagnosis may be noted if a client who has been with his or her partner for one month reacts by becoming enraged.

Clients may be better serviced in the counseling field by examining the impact Social Exchange variables have on jealousy levels. Examining the extent to which a person is affected by these five correlates of jealousy may have implications for the treatment strategy. For example, a person whose self-esteem plummets dramatically when a threat is perceived to his or her romantic involvement may benefit from self-esteem enhancement.

This investigation provided evidence that the strength of the dating relationship is most accurately reflected in the strength component. The influence that people have concerning the decisions their partners make is more indicative of the intensity of the relationship than time spent or different number of activities engaged in together. This is an important distinction to be made concerning dating relationships. People involved in casual or non-romantic relationships may spend a considerable amount of time with another person engaging in various activities, yet may not influence the life decisions and goals of the other person. It is possible for couples to influence the lives of their partner in significant areas while living across the country or having an opposite work schedule.

Though this investigation has provided insight in to the nature and intensity levels of dating relationships with respect to jealousy levels, there exist a few shortcomings. The primary problem is that the sample was not representative of the population as a whole. The majority of respondents were European American, female, heterosexual graduate students. As a result, barriers exist regarding the generalizability of the findings. Increasing the sample size to include respondents of diverse backgrounds would have addressed this limitation.

In addition, only one partner was represented from each dating relationship, therefore the partner questioned may have a different interpretation of the relationship than the partner not surveyed. The answers may have been a product of what the questioned partner hoped for in the relationship. It is significant to note that jealousy is a phenomenological experience and can result from real or imaginary threat. Examining past and present relationship factors such as infidelity may have provided information regarding which respondents have been conditioned to experience jealousy in their romantic involvements. The extent to which the respondents may have currently perceived a threat to exist in their indicated relationship would have offered valuable insight for the responses given.

In relation to theoretical shortcomings, this investigation was examined from an individualistic viewpoint. It was examined according to the decisions individuals make for themselves, based on the rewards they hope to receive. Because this concept is largely consistent with Western ideology, it does not provide implications for those cultures based in collectivism.

Further research is needed in this area. It would provide valuable information to examine the dynamics which exist in marital relationships. A primary focus would be to investigate the intensity and jealousy level in relationships according to the number of years together. Also, applying the methods of the current investigation to a sample of gay, lesbian, and bisexual men and women would be beneficial. This would provide information regarding the similarities and differences between heterosexuals in parallel relationships, both dating and married.

Relating to the constructed model, it would prove beneficial to examine the relationship between intensity levels and the Social Exchange variables: dependency, self-esteem, insecurity, locus of control, and involvement. The association demonstrated to exist between the intensity of the relationship and levels of jealousy could be more

thoroughly analyzed if this relationship were examined. Focusing on which variable is more indicative of intensity levels, and therefore jealousy levels, would be useful in examining personal attributes that influence these relationship dynamics.

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## VITA

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Currently, Danielle attends Loyola University Chicago where she is working towards her Master of Arts in community counseling. As part of her training she is an intern at Spectrum Youth and Family Services in Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Her responsibilities include walk-in coverage, intake interviews, and maintaining a client caseload. Other duties involve providing outreach services for at-risk adolescents at the Vogeley Teen Center in Hoffman Estates, Illinois. She graduates in May of 1996 and will continue her education at the doctoral level.

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The thesis is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of master of arts.

4/1/96  
Date

  
Director's Signature